

The Arts

Magnitude of Beethoven's Quartets

Wigmore Hall Recitals

To perform Beethoven's three great middle-period quartets and all his late ones within a week, as the Loewenguth quartet are now doing at the Wigmore Hall, represents an undertaking, both physical and spiritual, of some magnitude. Last night, in the first of their recitals, they did not altogether resolve the doubts as to whether they are suitably equipped for the task.

That they should more than occasionally have been troubled by difficulties of intonation may perhaps be understandable, in an opening recital, but it is none the less regrettable, for it interfered substantially with one's ability to concentrate on the music's communicative purpose. Possibly more disturbing as the quartet's evident inability to produce a warm, soft, silky tone—an absolute prerequisite for conveying the tenderness of such a movement as the Adagio of Op. 59 No. 2 or the Adagio which lies deep at the heart of the Lento Assai of Op. 135.

Among the quartet's more positive characteristics is their strong, incisive rhythmic impulse—they gave a powerful, obstinate account of the Op. 59 No. 2 finale—and the evenness of their dynamic balance: a forthright, slightly reedyned second violin and a generous-sounding viola ensured that inner textural detail never went astray, a particular merit in such a movement as the first of Op. 135, where their performance made excellent sense out of Beethoven's unpredictable markings and his epigrammatic phraseology.

Relishing of detail, however, sometimes led them astray in the middle-period work, whose spaciousness of thought was often contradicted—not least when intermediate, time-marking sections were played at the same emotional temperature as the rest. And in the first movement of Op. 132, although the marvellous lyrical theme was played with its proper agonizing sweetness, the rapid changes of mood were imperfectly realized.

This work naturally proved the most demanding of the three: the *dolce* specified for the trio of the scherzo was not even suggested, while the want of gentleness and the intonation weaknesses revealed by *senza vibrato* playing—seriously marred the Lydian mode move-



Mr. Gerhard Schinschke, as the Attorney, and Mr. Dieter Borsche, as Oppenheimer, in *The Case of J. Robert Oppenheimer*.

THE OPPENHEIMER CASE

From Our Special Correspondent—BERLIN, Oct. 12

Many playwrights are aware of the value of introducing a trial scene into a play and have achieved popular success through simulating the atmosphere of the court room inside the theatre throughout the whole length of a play. One would not, at first, have thought that the Congressional hearings of victims of McCarthyism would have made for good drama in the theatre, though they were striking enough on the television screen at a time when political passions ran high.

Mr. Heinar Kipphardt's new play, entitled *The Case of J. Robert Oppenheimer*, belongs to the last category. To judge from the first-night reactions here, it looks like breaking all records not only at the Freie Volksbühne where it was staged by Mr. Erwin Piscator on Sunday night, but wherever it is likely to be put on. Its author describes it as a "Report for the Stage". It is in fact adapted from an earlier documentary prize-winning play which Mr. Kipphardt wrote two years ago, using for his sources the 3,000 typewritten pages of the United States Atomic Energy Commission report on the Oppenheimer loyalty hearings.

In spite of Mr. Kipphardt's disclaimer (he will not have it called a "documentary") it is just that. It is true that dramatic convention demands compression and curtailment. But in essence it is the hearings and nothing but the hearings. A sharp dramatic immediacy is given to the play by Mr. Piscator through the use of filmed sequences. These have a double function, first to allow the audience to see the nuclear explosions which underlie the Oppenheimer controversy, and secondly to enable the characters in the drama to

film inside the playhouse, assures to himself all the winning theatrical tricks in this particular game.

It is well known that Mr. Piscator's theatre is political. Mr. Kipphardt's play, too, has a political function. One can hardly imagine a happier partnership. Their object, to quote Brecht, is "to teach entertainingly". This they do consummately, though one's definition of entertainment is, of course, likely to be governed by preconceived notions of the nuclear controversy.

Yet all along one's attention is riveted to the live actors in the play, as it were. One's sympathies are obviously engaged on behalf of the protagonist (unless, of course, one is oneself a red-baiter by nature, in which case one will surely take the side of those who tried to match their puny intellects with Oppenheimer's). One listens with rapt attention to the courteous questions of the three-man investigating board, to the clever manoeuvring of the rival counsel, or to the witness, from the generous-minded to the pitifully self-assured.

Oppenheimer comes out of his ordeal well. His earlier weaknesses are not glossed over but his conduct at the hearings redeems them. Here is a man to whom one's heart warms. As played by Mr. Dieter Borsche (who played Pope Pius XII for Mr. Piscator here two years ago), the nuclear scientist is a humanist and rationalist; but he also has a heart and warm human instincts, some of which (such as when he contemptuously dismisses his former colleague Teller) may earn a reproach or two but are soon forgiven.

Mr. Hans Ulrich Schmückle is responsible for the décor, a low, half-size grey wooden shack, in which human beings are reduced almost to pawns in a game. The films that surmount it and the sound

Art Nouveau has made a thorough, rapid, and complete return to public favour. A new exhibition at the Piccadilly Gallery—the more telling because most of the objects in it are on a small scale—leads me to ponder not only the nature of the Art Nouveau style itself, but our current reaction to it. Indeed, if I use this very word "style", so all-embracing, and so inseparable from any discussion of Art Nouveau, which gives me pause.

The prophets of the Art Nouveau revival always make such a point of telling us that this was the last moment in history when a "unified style" could be seen affecting all the visual arts: not only furniture design, jewelry and ceramics; but architecture, sculpture, and painting. Certainly, as far as the minor arts are concerned, we are seldom in doubt as to what is an Art Nouveau object. Whether the ruling influence be Celtic, Japanese or Persian, or whether it springs from much nearer home—the press at Kelmscott or the plant-houses of Arts and Crafts—it is impossible to mistake the characteristics of Art Nouveau design. That willfulness, that slipperiness, that sinuosity: we can tell where we are at once.

Or can we? It often seems to me that the important issues are being dodged: that Art Nouveau is not in fact a style like other styles. There is in it a very strong element, not only of style, but of stylishness—of what one might call the will to style. Though this, perhaps, may sound like mere word-play. Yet we must consider one thing at least—the extent to which it is self-conscious, in the extent to which it stands apart from the current of its times. If we consider the development of the great historical styles—not only the sud-

den revolutions, but the gradual, insidious transformations of one thing into another of Gothic into Renaissance, Renaissance into Baroque, Baroque into Rococo, Rococo into Neo-Classical—we are conscious of the extent to which these changes are linked to other changes, affecting all the departments of living. The whole development is organic, from first to last. I cannot see that Art Nouveau is the logical progression from the High Victorian style, even though ancestors may be found for the Art Nouveau designers among the Pre-Raphaelites.

And it is one of the significant things about Art Nouveau that, while hospitable to all sorts of minor talents, it tended to find no room for the major artists of the period. I think, in particular, of the early career of Picasso—who at one stage came very near to reaching an accommodation with Art Nouveau. Yet Picasso's work, of the Blue and Rose periods has about it an air of falsity which disturbs (and rightly) some of his greatest admirers. These harlequins, acrobats, beggars, children there is about them all something which is distinctly *volau*. Though Picasso's own circumstances were for the most part miserable enough when these pictures were painted, we feel sure that the *miserabilisme* we find in them springs from quite another impulse. They are not meant to harrow, but to reassure. And so skilfully, so sweetly, so fluently is it done that they have gone on offering reassurance ever since: and especially to those who have the money to pay for it.

Picasso, of course, was intelligent enough to revolt after a time—and so violent was the explosion that painting has never been quite the same since. But what about the minor Art Nouveau artists—the predecessors and contem-

poraries of the young Spaniard? It has often been pointed out, and with some complacency, that their work was feverish and erotic. We lick our lips, and at the same time we permit ourselves to smile at the naïveté of it all. Yet I suspect that it is often their cynicism, rather than their feverishness or their eroticism, which has made these artists popular again.

To understand this, we must go back a little way. At first sight, many Art Nouveau objects seem to offer one thing which High Victorian objects had also offered—a means of escape from the horrors of nineteenth-century industrialism. Throughout the nineteenth century, the retreat towards an imagined Middle Ages had tempted both the wealthy and the intellectual. The Victorians had at least the merit of taking this dream world seriously. Nobody who looks at Butterfield's Keble can doubt that. Art Nouveau represents the betrayal of this seriousness. Dreams were now to be mocked. One of the leading characteristics of Art Nouveau is the element of parody in its make-up. The wit of Beardsley is a wit of totally ungenial burlesque, as his contemporaries well knew. But we get a glimpse of this stylistic clowning even in some of the most ordinary and mundane objects turned out by the Art Nouveau designers. A Liberty jewel-box may seem a casket for an Isolda, but is a denial, at the same time, that Isoldes are possible.

But why pull such long faces? Doesn't the phenomenon I've been describing have its admirable side? The answer is that the parody and the cynicism of Art Nouveau are only part of its total effect, just as dreaminess is another part. What we see in Art Nouveau

—saving the work of a few creative architects—is a deliberate choice of shallowness over profundity, of convention over freedom. The wild success of Art Nouveau with its first public design is so entirely self-regarding. It ignored all problems which it had not itself created, and severed its connexions with social ideas. Yet, though unconsciously, it remained the perfect expression of the plutocracy of the period: restless, avid for novelty, and afraid of thought. Art Nouveau set out to be *salutaire*—the impact was to be immediate, the chosen characteristics were to be few and easy to remember. But the cry of "art for art's sake" takes on distinctly savage and sinister overtones when we consider that it heralded the First World War.

Yet, again, there is a postscript to this. It may seem absurd, having already mentioned Picasso, to introduce the name of that minor Victorian painter William Dyce, who is now being honoured with a retrospective exhibition at Agnew's. But to move from the assertive jungle of objects in the Piccadilly Gallery to look at Dyce's well-known picture "Pegwell Bay" (which is, in fact, normally visible at the Tate) is almost to fall into a trap. There is no style here—and surely we well enough without it? A glimpse at the preliminary drawing makes the mistake. The scene is subtly ordered, the various figures are placed in the setting with a geometry which, how faintly, echoes Piero della Francesca. Style as a servant—as that which motives an underlying pictorial harmony—can never be discarded. It is when style develops into stylishness it becomes tyrannical.

A Portrayal of Vigour and Vivacity

Royal Opera House: *Mam'zelle Angot*

Massine's *Mam'zelle Angot* is one of those useful ballets which form the backbone of any repertory, largely through their ability to survive apparently any number of cast changes. Last night at Covent Garden virtually a new cast of principals took the ballet over, and although they had all been seen in it briefly during the summer at Drury Lane, two of them, Miss Annette Page and Mr. Christopher Gable, were making their Opera House debuts in the work.

Miss Page, usually regarded as a classically trained dancer, is a standard-bearer of the ballet, perhaps more by the force of her personality than by her art.

The caricaturist hero who plays fast and loose with Angot's heart, is an unrewarding, cipher-like role, but not quite so unrewarding as Mr. Gable allowed him to appear. Mr. Gable seemed oddly off-form, confining his acting to little more than a few boyish grins, and even leaving a smudged impression with both his dancing and partnering.

This, then, was disappointing, but the return of Mr. Brian Shaw to the role of the Barber, after a lapse of many years, provided a happier occasion. Massine's Barber is nowadays so identified with Mr. Alexander Grant that any dancer offering an alternative interpretation starts off by wearing a spectral Mr. Grant as a millstone round his neck. Mr. Shaw cast off this strangling burden with surprising ease, and his crisply danced characterization of the Chaplinesque Barber hopelessly, yet, of course, successfully, wooing his girl, had its own chirpy vitality.

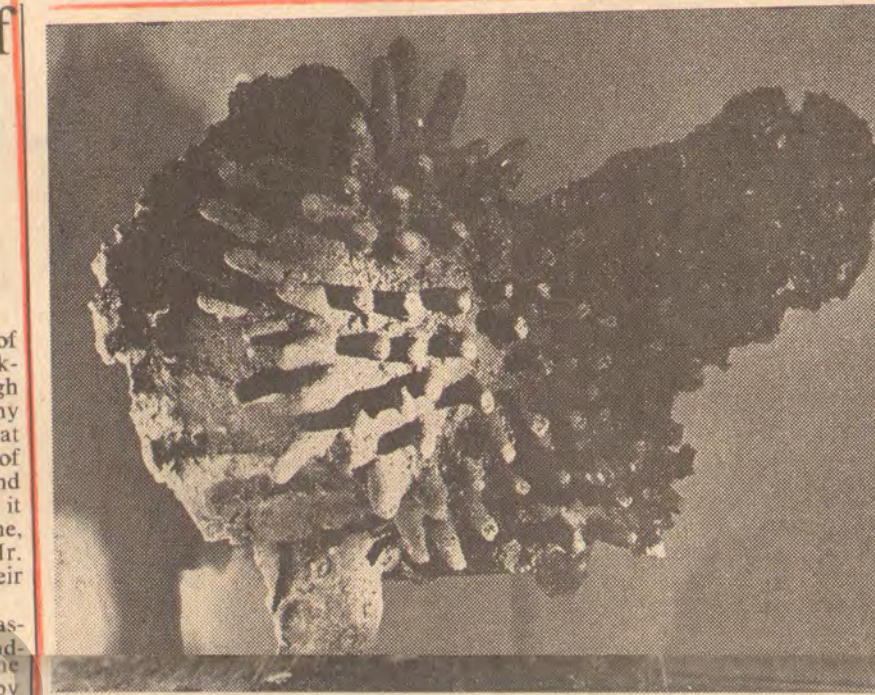
However, the most amusing performance in the ballet remained Mr. Stanley Holden's outrageously exaggerated portrait of the doddering Chief of Police. Mr. Holden steals every scene he appears in, shamelessly, endearingly, and inevitably. In a lesser artist, or a more important ballet, Mr. Holden's magnification of so minor a role would be unforgivable; in *Mam'zelle Angot* it is merely unforgettable.

THEATRE'S YOUTH WORKSHOP

An experiment designed to stimulate interest in drama among young people in the 10 to 16 age group got off to a flying start at Nottingham Playhouse last week-end. More than 400 youngsters crowded into the stalls of the theatre on Saturday for the evening session of the Playhouse Youth Workshop, which Mr. Colin George, the man behind the idea, hopes will eventually lead to the establishment of a children's theatre.

The idea is to enable the members of the workshop not only to watch plays but to become involved in the making of them in a real theatre with the help of professional actors. And it was not long on Saturday before one group was rehearsing the Troll scene from *Peer Gynt* using the theatre's lighting equipment and sound effects.

The Kalinga Prize for 1964 of £2,000 has been awarded to a Yugoslav director, Veljko Bulajic, for *Skopje 63*. Singled out by an international jury for honourable mention were *L'Art Nègre*, presented by France, and *A New Reality*, presented by Denmark.



Sculpture, 1962, by Sergio de Camargo.

Art from South America

From Our Art Critic

Europe has recently enthusiastically received the work of such varied artists as Matta, Soto, LeParc, Vitullo, and Alicia Penalba perhaps without realizing that they all share a continent of origin—South America. But the sharp-eyed have noticed it and a leading French art magazine recently came out with a special number on Brazil. *The Centre for Advanced Creative Study*, 22 Cornwall Gardens, S.W. 7, is currently holding an exhibition of recent South American art whose merit is not only that it is first in the field but that it contains work of great quality.

It would be absurd to generalize too much about South America. Climate varies from tropical, through very English to arctic conditions, and the name "South America" means little to South Americans. Certainly, though, the three main countries—Brazil, Argentina, and Venezuela—have none of the philistinism of a "land of opportunity". Deep in their hearts is a good dose of old Europe and the extraordinary flowering of modern architecture in Brasilia, Rio, and Caracas, for instance—which has so impressed us over here, is no folk art but European lessons learnt and improved on with a conviction we lack. In the visual arts much of their work shows their belief that art should not be practised apart from society, and the joint work of artists and architects at the University of Caracas—now 10 years old—is still perhaps the best example of this sort of thing anywhere in the world.

There is no primitive crudity in the work of artists like Alejandro Otero, the most influential abstract painter on the continent, or Carlos Cruz-Diez, one of the most talented of the younger generation, nor is there any trace of the false crudity of over-sophisticated centres of art. Their work has a purity which must bring Londoners up with a start.

Probably the most considerable artist here is Sergio de Camargo, a Brazilian who won the international sculpture prize at the last Paris Biennale. The rhythms of organic growth are movingly suggested in his wooden reliefs. They

are in fact beautifully logical constructions on a flat ground of similar white wooden pieces of different sizes and set at different angles which also divide the light into intervals across the surface. Camargo's work has a genuine closeness to the earth which is neither haphazard, brutal, nor, on the other side, the application of a theory. There are other good artists but no room to mention them. A large collection of prints completes this remarkable exhibition.

MISS ANNETTE PAGE TO DANCE IN STOCKHOLM

Miss Annette Page, ballerina of the Royal Ballet, has been invited by the Royal Swedish Ballet to give two performances of *Giselle*, partnered by Mr. Erik Bruhn, at the Royal Opera, Stockholm, on October 21 and 23. She leaves tomorrow for Copenhagen, where she is to rehearse.



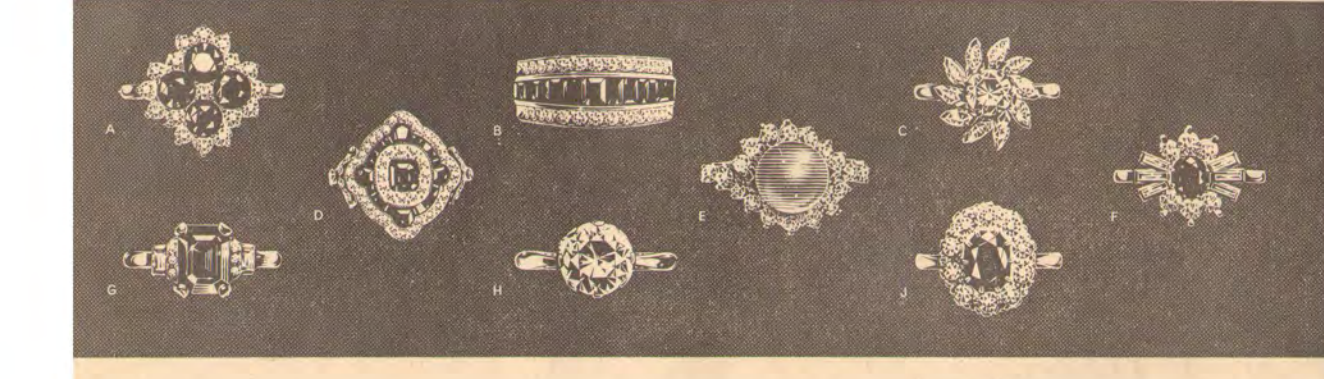
But which wine? Is this Blue Nun you're giving us, you young rascal? Thought I recognised the label... Good. Sets the chef's efforts off perfectly. Roscoe likes it too, don't you? Of course, he does live on fish... But don't let that worry you... just keep pouring. Right through the meal, m'boy, right through the meal!

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